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U.S. Rep. John Campbell, the former Irvine state senator who replaced Chris Cox in Congress after Mr. Cox was appointed chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, visited the Register this week for an Editorial Board meeting, after his first few days in the hallowed halls of the United States Capitol.

He hasn't been there long enough to be, shall we say, damaged by the twin infections of power and prestige, so it was a good chance to assess his fresh priorities as he tackles an exciting new challenge. It has been depressing for those of us who favor limited government to watch the soured fruits of the 1994 Republican Revolution, which was supposed to bring about a smaller government, given Republican congressional majorities coupled with a conservative Republican president.

Instead, government spending is at record levels, government power is expanding everywhere, and one scandal follows another in Washington.

Rep. Campbell is going into the lion's den, but at least he goes there with some well-grounded and important principles. For starters, he wants to push for a tough spending cap similar to the one he unsuccessfully pushed for in the California Legislature. That proposal limited government's annual budget increases to the increase in population and inflation.

"We need an external discipline" on federal budget growth, he said.

Rep. Campbell also agreed with us about the need for dramatic pension reform, given that unsustainable levels of pension guarantees are driving local governments to the fiscal brink and harming private companies. He supports legislation that requires private firms to detail how they intend to fund these plans, but is still mulling ways that similar discipline can be applied to the

public sector.

As he meets with his Washington and California staff in Orange County today, the nation's newest member of Congress said he is detailing some big picture items and some smaller priorities. On the issue of bringing home the bacon vs. stopping pork spending, Rep. Campbell struck the right note. He said he is willing to cut anything, and that he will not expand the government to bring home projects to Orange County, although he will push for a good share of legitimate road and other infrastructure spending.

Beyond spending limits, he hopes to have a large role in tax reform. On a more specific note, he wants to take up Chris Cox's hobby horse - an insistence that the death tax repeal be made permanent. He also wants to play a role in keeping the tax man away from the freewheeling Internet.

One Orange County issue of importance is urban runoff and its effects on streams and beaches. He is interested in remedies that favor urban run-off clean-up facilities, as opposed to those that lead to penalties on individuals, such as limiting lawn watering and washing the car at home.

As a freshman, Rep. Campbell cannot be appointed to the Ways and Means Committee, but he has asked to be on the Financial Services Committee. He also would like to be on the International Relations Committee. International relations is one area where the federal government has clear authority, he said, and he has a strong interest in the topic.

This is a good start. Now, we'll have to keep tabs on him to make sure Rep. Campbell doesn't go native.